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Boston Redevelopment Authority

Downtown, R-46

August 1962

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Section G. Functional Areas



Downtown R-46  
G. Functional Areas

CBD  
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PREFACE

This section contains descriptions of the major functional areas (see Downtown Functional Areas Map, G-8) that exist in and adjacent to the Central Business District. The boundaries of these areas comprise a close representation of areas of predominant activity. However, in many cases the boundary lines are necessarily subjective approximations of where changes in predominant activity take place. Each description is primarily an account of the major activities in the area and the problems and assets that are present. The emphasis in this section will be on the existing environmental problems and assets.

The areas described in the following pages are:

CBD

1. Chinese Commercial
2. Entertainment
3. Finance, Insurance, Professional Services
4. Garment Industry
5. Leather and Other Wholesaling
6. Retail Core
7. Specialty Retail
8. Transportation Services



## CBD FUNCTIONAL AREAS

### 1. CHINESE COMMERCIAL

This area has long been the focus of Chinese social and commercial activities. There are a number of Chinese restaurants, grocery stores, tailor shops, novelty shops and other specialty stores located on Hudson, Tyler, and Kneeland Streets. Many buildings in this area that have retail uses on the first floor have residential uses on the upper floors. Most of the structures are either non-fire-proof pre-1890 loft buildings or pre-1870 small scale residential buildings. The majority of structures need either major or extensive minor repair, yet they are intensively used during both daylight and evening hours.

The streets are narrow in this area and traffic congestion is prevalent, especially in the evening hours. The area is not strongly linked to the entertainment area around Washington and Kneeland Streets, and this tends to decrease the interaction of people between the two areas. The Chinese residential community is closely related to the south and this strengthens the area because it provides steady patrons and workers within walking distance.

### 2. ENTERTAINMENT

This large area is the major entertainment center for the region. Three major legitimate theaters; the Colonial, Shubert and the Wilbur, are located here as well as a smaller "off Broadway" type theater. Numerous movie theatres are also in this area. The Music Hall, Gary, Saxon, RKO Keiths, Paramount and the Astor are the major ones. Night Clubs, lounges, honky-tonk bars and restaurant.



are also numerous. The exact boundaries of the area are difficult to indicate because there is a gradual blend of retailing and entertainment activities on Boylston and Stuart Street toward Back Bay and on Washington Street toward the prime retail area.

Tremont, Washington and Stuart-Kneeland are the three major streets through the area. The entertainment area is not highly concentrated and the many surface parking lots are a reflection of this fact. The parking lots are used by shoppers and workers during the day and by the entertainment patrons at night. The structures are primarily theatres, non-fireproof pre-1890 loft buildings and pre-1870 small scale residential buildings. The structures are about equally divided between those needing major repairs and those needing extensive minor repairs.

At present the activity linkage between this and the adjacent retail area are rather poor. Also, much better linkages can be made with Tufts-New England Medical Center on one side and the Chinese community on the other.

### 3. FINANCE, INSURANCE, PROFESSIONAL SERVICES AREA

The major concentration of office space in the city extends from Post Office Square to State Street and the Central Artery. It is here that banking, investment, law, real estate, insurance, and other services abound. This area is closely linked with the government office area to the West and the downtown retail area to the southwest. The availability of shopping makes this office district attractive to workers. The streets in this area are generally narrow and are often confusing because they lie in





a distorted grid pattern. The buildings in this area are mainly 11 to 24 story fire-proof office buildings constructed between 1920 and 1950. A major circulation problem in this area is the lack of adequate north-south streets to accommodate the high volume of the traffic penetrating State Street from the north. Most of the major structures in this area are in need of only minor repairs and only a few need extensive minor repair. In areas near the Central Artery, many loft buildings are frequently obsolescent and have a high vacancy rate. There is a need for long term parking space to service this office district area. In the heart of this area the scale of the buildings is very massive, but on the perimeter the scale decreases and there are many 6-14 story or lower buildings.

#### 4. THE GARMENT INDUSTRY

An area between the retail area, the entertainment area, the Tufts-New England Medical Center area, and the Chinese Commercial area, is similarly occupied by the garment industry.

The wholesaling activities are generally separate businesses carried on in older buildings and clustered in distinct districts. The location of wholesaling and manufacturing districts is closely tied to the historical development of Boston. These trade centers gradually shifted westward as the business district expanded in the 19th Century. Those remaining in the CBD today have been in their present location for many years. The wool trade is along lower Summer St., the Shoe and Leather business around Lincoln St., the garment district on Kneeland St., the meat and produce wholesale:



between Faneuil Hall and the waterfront, and the furniture wholesaler in the North Station Area. Because of the diverse adjacent functional areas the delineation of the garment industry is very vague. Most of the structures are in need of extensive minor repair and some are in need of major repair. The street pattern in the garment area tends to be very confusing. The proximity to major streets, the Central Artery, and truck terminals afford a good site advantage. Because of the wholesaling and industrial nature there is a very acute problem of on-street loading. The extent of the garment industry in terms of geographical coverage has diminished over time and it is open to question whether this is due to the pressure of the competing land uses around it, or a general decline in the garment market. The area is not very lively during the day and is very dull at night. There is little pedestrian activity.

#### 5. LEATHER AND OTHER WHOLESALING AREA

This area lying adjacent to the South Station and the future terminus of the Massachusetts Turnpike is advantageously located in terms of rail and truck access. The majority of buildings in the area are loft buildings with about half being pre-1890 non-fireproof buildings and the remainder a mix of 5-8 story 1890-1920 fireproof loft buildings and 8-14 story 1920-1940 fireproof loft buildings. This area is completely dead at night in terms of pedestrian activity or night life. It has been cut off from the retail core area, the garment district, and the Chinese Commercial area by the construction of the Central Artery. Most of the build-



ings in the area are in need of only minor repair although there is a block or two in need of extensive minor repair. Primary activity in this area is wholesaling or middleman operation.

## 6. RETAIL CORE AREA

This is the predominant retail area of the metropolitan region. The secondary retail area, which will be discussed later, is Back Bay adjacent to the western boundary of the Downtown GNRP. The retail area contains large department stores such as Filenes, Jordan Marsh, Raymond's, Gilchrist, and City Mart. It also contains many Men's and Women's Apparel Shops, specialized shopping such as jewelry, cameras, etc. The focal point of this area is the intersection of Summer and Washington Streets and a major concentration stretches down Summer St. toward South Station. This area is well served by three subway routes. The major streets in the area are Tremont, Washington and Summer Street. Washington St. and Summer St. are the two most heavily traveled pedestrian streets and the streets upon which most retailing activity takes place. The sidewalks in general are very narrow which results in much pedestrian congestion. Severe congestion often results when the pedestrian traffic is mixed with the automobile traffic on the narrow rights-of-way. There is a definite lack of short term parking space convenient to the retail area. At present many upper floors of establishments are vacant. Tremont Street in the past years has lost much of the vitality it once had, reflected by the many vacancies and the great number of marginal establishments making short term use of the Tremont ground floor frontage. A new department store, The City Mart, has just opened in the old R.H.





White's store building, which was vacant for five years. The majority of structures in this area are in need of only minor repair although there are some structures in need of extensive minor repair.

#### 7. SPECIALTY RETAIL AREA.

Only a slight portion of this area actually lies. the Downtown GNRP. Most of these are pre-1890 non-fireproof loft buildings in need of minor repair. The Back Bay specialty retail area is to the West of the downtown retail area along Boylston and Newbury Streets. The Park Square area, between the Back Bay portion of the specialty retail area and the Downtown GNRP is very weak. The buildings are in poor condition and there are many marginal uses. There are also a number of restaurants, bars, and other low-intensity entertainment activities located here. The Back Bay portion of this specialty retail area concentrates on fashionable high-priced items with the emphasis on Women's Apparel Shops, Men's Specialty and Jewelry and Art Shops.

#### 8. TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

This is a rather small area generally referred to as Park Square, lying adjacent to the specialty retail and entertainment areas. The Greyhound and Trailways Bus Terminals are located here. There are also several Rent-A-Car establishments. The street pattern in this area is very confusing due to a number of diagonal streets intersecting a basic grid pattern. There is one large eight-story parking garage in the middle of the area. The streets are very wide here.





## CBD Survey and Planning Application

The Survey and Planning Application for the CBD Project was approved by the BRA on August 15, 1962/. As of August 30, 1962, the document is being reviewed by the Boston City Council.

Sections of the application which are pertinent to this initial background for planning package are:

R-102 - Urban Renewal Data - general acreage and population statistics, environmental deficiencies.

R-103 - Report on Urban Renewal Area - Selection of area and delineation of boundaries

R-121 - Estimate of Federal Grant Requirement

MAPS- Central Business District Locality Maps 1 and 2, Existing Land Use, Existing Building Conditions

Attachments - By-laws of the Committee for the Central Business District, Inc.; Roster of membership of the CCBD, Inc.

